

U. S. Studies Proposal by Pilot's Father

Powers-for-Abel Spy Swap Sought

By Walter D. Littell

A move to exchange Francis Gary Powers, pilot of the U-2 plane downed in the Soviet Union, for Rudolph Ivanovich Abel, high-ranking Russian spy now in the Atlanta Federal Penitentiary, has been made by his father, Oliver Powers.

James B. Donovan, court-appointed attorney for Abel, announced here yesterday that Oliver Powers had written the former colonel in Russia's State Security Service, offering to approach both the State Department and President Eisenhower on the exchange. Mr. Donovan said that Abel, sentenced to thirty years in prison for espionage, suggested that M. Donovan meet in Switzerland with an East German lawyer.

The proposal of an exchange was communicated by Mr. Donovan to "the proper authorities" in the government. Yesterday afternoon Washington told Mr. Donovan that it would let him know "within the next few days" about the

proposed meeting in Switzerland.

Neither the Justice Department nor the State Department



Col. Rudolph Abel



Francis G. Powers

ment nor the State Department in Washington would comment officially on the proposed exchange. According to some sources, the State Department was not "concentrated" on the possibility of exchanging Mr. Powers for Abel. Apparently, the department has had this facet of the forthcoming trial of Mr. Powers in Soviet Russia for spying under consideration but did not seriously consider it because it felt the Russian government would never accept the idea of an exchange.

As one official in Washington pointed out, the Russians have never recognized Abel, who was head of the Soviet spy apparatus in this country before he was caught, as their agent or even a Russian citizen. The official said it seemed doubtful that the Russians would want to involve themselves in any transactions involving Abel, since this would be an admission that Abel was their spy.

Laid Ground for Exchange

Though Washington seems dubious about an exchange, Mr. Donovan may not be. Mr. Donovan, a member of the Office of Strategic Services during World War II, laid the grounds for an exchange when he told the judge at Abel's trial in 1957 that a capital sentence could be shorted.

With what now appears to be a remarkable vision, Mr. Donovan presented this argument against putting Abel to death:

It is possible that in the foreseeable future an American of equivalent rank will be captured by the Soviet Union, or by an ally. At such time, an exchange of prisoners through diplomatic channels would be considered to be in the best national interest of the United States.

Statement on Proposal
Publicly, Mr. Donovan would not say what he thought the chances of an exchange were. He released a carefully written statement on the elder Mr. Powers' proposal from his office at 161 William St. but said that any further comment would have to come from the State Department.

According to the statement, this is the sequence of events on the proposal:

On June 2, the pilot's father wrote Abel in the Federal Penitentiary at Atlanta offering to approach President Eisenhower and the State Department to exchange Abel for his son. He asked that Abel write to the Soviet Union with the same suggestion. Two days later, Abel replied to Mr. Powers that he should address his request to Abel's family in East Germany.

The same day, Abel wrote to Mr. Donovan about this correspondence and suggested that Mr. Donovan meet in Switzerland with his family's lawyer to discuss the exchange. Abel suggested such a move, knowing that Mr. Donovan had been planning for several months to leave by ship today for a business trip to England and Zurich, Switzerland.

The senior Mr. Powers, who this week received speedy approval from both the United States and Russia to go to Moscow in his effort to help his son, could not be reached by telephone yesterday for comment. Sol Curry, a Norton, Va., friend scheduled to accompany Mr. Powers on the trip, said on the telephone that he knew nothing of the exchange proposal.

Part of a Series

The move by Mr. Powers for an Abel-Powers exchange is the latest in a series of developments since his son was downed while piloting the high-flying, camera-equipped U-2 plane over the Soviet Union on May 1. The pilot will be tried on spy charges perhaps next month, according to the Russians, and he could receive a sentence of from seven years to death.

While the U-2 plane led to great international complications, not the least of which was the scuttling of the summit conference in Paris by Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev, the arrest of Abel by the F. B. I. in 1957 had no such repercussions. Abel, fifty-nine, posed as an artist in Brooklyn and set up in his studio radio receivers capable of picking up messages from Moscow. He was convicted of conspiring to steal United States military secrets and sending them to Russia.

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